

Luke 24:13–35

Hearts Burning Within Us

I have had it happen numerous times in the last several months. People don't know who I am. Between the long grey hair and a major weight loss, people have not known it was me until I spoke or even told them it was me. I have had it with others as well, particularly when I haven't seen someone for a very long time. There is something familiar about them, but I can't place why or how I know them.

We don't know why Cleopas and his companion did not recognize Jesus right away. We are only told that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." (v17). It may have been that his resurrection body was different from what they had experienced of him before his death. We are not given the details. What we do know is that Jesus came alongside them at a time when their grief was deep. They were confused, heartbroken, and despairing because that is what grief is like. It is not simple or straightforward. Grief is filled with questions, what ifs and if only thoughts. Grief spirals our emotions to depths that we didn't know we could experience.

Grief is also filled with stories and emotions from anger to hope, tears to laughter. It doesn't make sense. It goes round and round like the stories that describe the person or situation being grieved and includes stories of loss, heartbreak and loneliness. It is an invitation to the sharing of stories that the stranger, who we know as Jesus, asks to hear and then shares with the traveling companions.

Story telling is how we get to know one another, it is how we process our experiences. Just this past weekend I said to a friend and colleague, that I am not a good story teller and she responded that in her experience how I share of myself is always in stories. In this scripture, there is a lot of story telling, lots of discussion going on. We are told that two of the people who had been a part of the goings on in Jerusalem over the last days with Jesus in the week of his death are now walking the road to Emmaus "and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but [as was noted] their eyes were kept from recognizing him." (vv13-16) It is while they are talking and discussing that Jesus enters into the conversation asking "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" (v17)

Jesus meets them where they are, on the road on the way out of town. As old westerns movies often seemed to reference, they were getting out of Dodge. Even though they had heard from women and others that Jesus was not in the tomb and that Jesus was alive, it had not been enough. They were on their way back to what they knew, to what was or felt safe and familiar. They were sad and trying to make sense of it all...Jesus'

life, their hope, the horrible death, and now these stories of Jesus alive. And Jesus meets them there and listens to their story. He hears, feels, sees, and learns their story.

It is only after their time of sharing that Jesus speaks with them about what they have failed to believe, failed to understand, and tells them the old stories of “Moses and all the prophets as he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” (v27) Remember, they have yet to recognize him and, as the hour is getting late, Jesus “walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly [to stay with them] because it was almost evening and the day now nearly over. So he went in to stay with them.” (vv28-29)

Jesus did not force himself on them. He gave them a choice. He went ahead and would have kept going but he was invited to stay. It was in the home, over an ordinary meal, that “When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.”

Sharing of stories, sharing of a journey, sharing company with one another, and sharing of a meal. These are ways we join together. It is the story of Christian community. It is the story of relationship. It is how we are in or come to be in relationship with one another and with God. We gather, we come alongside each other, we share meals, both ordinary and extraordinary, in the potluck meals after worship or over our tables in our homes, and over the table that is set every time we have a service of communion.

We share in stories of our lives and each time we gather in worship, study, or discussion over a coffee we are able share in the stories of faith. When we hear the stories of Jesus when gathered together, we can help each other makes sense of things. It is through scripture that Jesus can help us make sense of things, bring understanding as well as hope when we despair.

But we are not rushed. Jesus comes alongside us wherever we are in our journey. We are given the choice to invite Jesus to continue with us or for him to go on without us. Maybe to join us again later. Maybe to give us time to make sense of where we are now. Sometimes we invite Jesus to stay with us even when we cannot come to grips with where life has taken us and what stories are unfolding.

Jesus is patient.

Yet, I invite you to see where your eyes might be opened and you might recognize Jesus. For the two on the road and after Jesus disappeared “They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’” (v32) Have you ever experienced Jesus in a way that you felt as if your heart was burning within you? Maybe you experience Jesus in a different part of your body. Some people refer to a gut feeling or somehow “knowing” that something or someone had impacted their lives. A head knowledge.

I encourage you to watch for, listen for, or even feel the presence of Jesus in your life. It may come through a conversation with others. It may be as you watch the snow fall or

the snow melt. It may be a walk, a run, in the music you play or the art you create. It may be in times of meditation or reading of scripture, poetry, or story. It might be in the closeness of a relationship or a person. It could be the very presence of the Holy that you experience. It may be in worship as you say a prayer, join with others in song, or listen to a message.

I assure you that Jesus is present. He is always near through the work and power of the Holy Spirit given to us as a gift from God. It may take practice to sense Jesus present, to have your heart burn within, to know the hope that comes from despair and to have the stories of our lives and that of scripture inform and take us along on the journey of faith, hope, and promise.

There is one more thing though. The traveling companions did not keep their experience to themselves. They shared it. Actually, all of the disciples of Jesus shared their stories with those they loved and those they came to know. They did not understand perfectly everything about their experience. It took time for them to make sense of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Most things do take time to process. Still, they lived what they knew. They gathered to be together as community, as friends, as companions. They gathered in community and in households. They shared stories and insights. They shared their lives.

They took bread, broke it and blessed it, then gave it to others, just as Jesus had told them to do. They did it in worship and they did it around the tables of those they encountered. They shared food, stories, and life. It is not so far from what we do everyday. They did it with the knowledge that Jesus was present. We get to do that still today.

We get to live our lives knowing that wherever we are at on our life's journey, Jesus is with us, walking alongside, sharing his life with us, giving us hope and new life as we are ready to take hold of it.

May you become aware of Jesus present with you in whatever way Jesus comes. Jesus will be present to you in ways that you can recognize, and one day, maybe that day has already happened, you experience his presence regularly. As you recognize Jesus with you, may your heart be burning warmly and with power within because you know Jesus loves you, is present with you, and is not going anywhere. He is with you.

I speak to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.